Should we eat less meat?

Faced with evidence of the meat industry's impact on global warming, can we justify our carnivorous appetites? An avowed vegetarian and sworn meat-lover lock horns

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MARY MCCARTNEY

Yes! I grew up in a vegetarian household, but when I left home I reconsidered why I was a vegetarian. I came to the conclusion that it is the best diet for me for health, environmental and animal welfare reasons.

My parents did influence my decision. Luckily my mum, Linda, was a great cook and would adapt traditional meals to make simple, tasty food. We still enjoyed Sunday roast, without the meat but with the roast veg, yorkshire puds and gravy.

I have tried meat and understand the appeal, but choose not to eat it as I don't want anything to be killed for my plate. I think of being vegetarian as being a really positive, enjoyable thing. And if you don't want to become one, even just reducing your meat consumption is a significant step towards helping curb climate change. We are increasingly aware of the negative, climate-changing impact the livestock industry is having. It is responsible for a huge volume of greenhouse gases and at the present rate, meat production is set to double by 2050.

The Meat Free Monday campaign, which I launched with my father, Paul, and sister, Stella, is a simple idea. Anyone can take part by choosing not to eat meat one day in the week and help reduce the impact of global meat production.

My children are vegetarian but I have explained to them that it is their choice; as and when they want to eat meat, it's their decision. When I was a child, school dinners were always a challenge as there was not really a vegetarian option on the menu. Happily, these days there is much more choice.

If you're not used to cooking without meat it can be a bit daunting at first. But there are some great, inspiring vegetarian cookbooks and recipe ideas online now. The Waitrose website has a selection of recipes and our Meat Free Monday website has plenty of ideas, too. And, if you're still stuck, there's always Linda McCartney ready meals!

For more on Meat Free Monday, see supportmfm.org.

ADAM EDWARDS

No! I blame Twiggy. The stick-thin '60s model made it fashionable to have a figure like a chopstick, and women have been struggling to be skinny ever since. The way to be catwalk-thin is, of course, to eat lettuce and berries rather than meat and two veg. In order to justify this diet as more than mere vanity, it has been put about by Wags and other posers that eating the flesh of animals is cruel.

Alright, this argument may have a politically incorrect flaw or two. But it's not that much dottier than scientists claiming that cows produce a fifth of greenhouse gas emissions, causing global warming. It's a bandwagon that has been jumped on by wan vegetarians, who use the figures to try to persuade us jolly beast-eaters to lay down the steak knife.

Poor old veggies – they get a rotten press in this country. The moment a lentil-lover admits to the herbivore cause, he or she is mobbed by the carnivore majority, who believe that anyone who voluntarily forswears flesh for farinaceous matter must be a loony. For meat is the stuff of England; our calendar is dominated by it, from Christmas turkey to spring lamb to Bonfire Night sausages. It's woven into our daily island life. To eat less would be to lessen what it is to be English.

Even more importantly, meat – in particular beef – is symbolic of our nation. In Shakespeare's *Henry V*, on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt, the Constable of France discusses with the Duke of Orleans the effect of meat on the English: 'give them great meals of beef... they will eat like wolves and fight like devils'. The Yeomen of the Guard became known as Beefeaters because of their huge consumption of the stuff, while in 1698, the author Henri Misson, in his book *Memoirs And Observations Of Travels Over England*, wrote that 'it is common practice, even among people of good substance, to have a huge piece of roast beef on Sundays, of which they stuff until they can swallow no more, and eat the rest cold, without any other victuals, the other six days of the week.' And the Continentals continue to refer to us as Rosbifs.

And why are we such a carnivorous nation? Because meat tastes wonderful. If we did give it up, we wouldn't live any longer – life would just seem longer.

Are vegetarians loony or should we eat less red meat? Email your views to waitrosekitchen@waitrose.co.uk.